



INTRODUCTION

TIP Strategies Inc. has been engaged by the City of College Station to review and assess the Northgate Redevelopment Ordinance, in the context of implementing the Northgate Redevelopment Plan, and to review for implementation issues that may or may not have been considered.

In general, the Plan and Ordinance are very good. TIP offers a few points that should deserve more attention. A summary of TIP's comments is provided below.

Overview

Many cities and universities across the country have embraced a denser, pedestrian-oriented, live/work/play plan for areas surrounding universities. The Northgate Redevelopment Plan lays out a clear and bold vision for a similar area immediately north of and adjacent to the Texas A&M campus. If successfully implemented, this district can yield a thriving area in College Station that will have many benefits to the community and university including a higher tax base and increased sales tax.

Indirect impacts of this type of a redevelopment strategy can yield a greater result. Studies have shown that creating a true live/work/play environment around a university results in a thriving place for young professionals, which often leads to increased entrepreneurship and a higher rate of retention of young professionals upon graduation from the university. Providing more informal spaces, such as coffee shops, will encourage more networking among entrepreneurs and can result in a healthy entrepreneurial climate. Students are also more interested in remaining in the community where they attended college when it is a thriving environment to live, work and play.

Assessment of Article 5.6-B – Northgate Districts

The Northgate Redevelopment District is a good idea for College Station. The Northgate Redevelopment Ordinance is clear and concise, and should stimulate redevelopment in the district. The three districts within Northgate (NG-1, NG-2 and NG-3) are distinct and clearly represent different purposes for Northgate. The Ordinance also illustrates the pedestrian, bicycle and mixed-use intent of the Redevelopment Plan. In our opinion, the points below are the only areas that deserve additional consideration:

- Graphics – It is noted that the City intends on adding graphics throughout the ordinance, but TIP cannot stress enough the importance of graphics so that users/developers may better understand the intent of certain provisions of the ordinance. The Urban Land Institute and the American Planning Association offer several resources through their product catalog that should be useful. Larger planning firms such as Fregonese & Calthorpe have an extensive library of graphics and pictures that could also be purchased. It may also be helpful to engage a local engineering firm to develop graphics that are specific to the ordinance. Using a local firm will give the City more feedback on how aspects of the ordinance could be implemented. Specific areas for graphic/illustration/image insertions include throughout the following sections: Building Design Standards, Off-Street Parking Standards, Sidewalk Standards, Landscape and Streetscape Standards, Sign Standards, and Outside Storage and Display Standards. You can never use too many graphics to illustrate a point.



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- Shower stalls – The installation of shower stalls in non-residential areas will serve as a stimulus to employees who may wish to bike to work. The City could add a provision in the ordinance that grants additional density for the installation of shower stalls for employee use.
- Sidewalk benches - It may be more appropriate and in the long-term more advantageous from an aesthetic perspective, to have the City or Management District develop and maintain all sidewalks, including the installation of landscaping, benches, street lighting, and bicycle racks. This would take the burden off the landowner/developer of installing some of this and allow for a more uniform look throughout the district.
- Detention Ponds – While it is understandable that the City would require on-site detention, this requirement will slow the process of infill development. If possible, waive the detention requirements and instead assess a fee-in-lieu of to be used to upgrade the drainage system. Our understanding is that the City is currently considering the feasibility of waiving detention requirements for projects less than 2 acres. This would certainly address this issue for infill development.
- Outdoor café-style seating – In certain areas of Northgate, it may be advantageous to allow and/or encourage outdoor seating. Additionally, it may be worth considering the allowance of garage-style windows (which can be lifted up during hours of operation) that face the ROW to create an “open-air” feeling in restaurants.

Implementation Issues Related to Northgate District

The Northgate Redevelopment Implementation Plan is thorough in its approach to implementing the vision for this area of College Station. It is important to continually ask the question “If not for the Northgate District Redevelopment Ordinance and the Implementation Plan, what type of infill development would occur?”

Many cities prefer a carrot approach to stimulate redevelopment by offering density bonuses, decreased setbacks, and similar incentives. College Station's approach to stimulate redevelopment is somewhat different. The redevelopment ordinance may not be enough to stimulate the infill development. With this in mind, the following points should be considered:

- Public spaces - The quotes from Robert Gibbs are on target and should be considered during implementation. Specifically, public space for outdoor concerts, public art, and public parking lots should all be a part of the Northgate District.
- Management – TIP understands that some of the landowners within the Northgate area are interested in a Management District, but that at this time it has not been formed. The City should understand that if a separate Management District is not created, the City should be prepared from a resource perspective to maintain all public places and rights-of-way, and to implement several of the improvement projects mentioned in the Implementation Plan. TIP understands that millions of dollars have been allocated for specific improvements including sidewalks and infrastructure, yet maintenance and uniform design is very important to the success of the Plan.



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- **Parking** – TIP understands that several parking garages are under construction or consideration. It may be worth considering another parking garage in other areas of the district, based upon projected parking demand. However, on-street parking, where appropriate, should be mandated for the simple reason that most people like to park in sight of their destination. On-street parking also creates another buffer from the pedestrian and vehicular traffic. On-street parking should be parallel – not at-angle or perpendicular. These latter types of on-street parking types create traffic nuisances.
- **Professional Services** – It would be worthwhile for the City to incentivize and recruit professional service firms to locate in this District. These employees will frequent other businesses during office hours and lunch hours, and will ultimately help these other businesses to succeed. The indirect effect is that additional pedestrian traffic from professionals will give the appearance of a thriving area.
- **Incentives** – The Chapter 380 grants that the City is willing to use for land cost buy-downs will prove to be very useful in implementation. The other types of incentives such as fee waivers can also be helpful. The City may want to consider fee-simple purchases of certain areas so that the City can then (through a competitive bidding process) offer the land to private developers with specific terms set forth by the City. Infrastructure improvements (see on-site drainage requirements below) will also stimulate investment.
- **Gentrification** – Although property values remain relatively low in this area (\$15-20 per square foot), results of redevelopment efforts across the country illustrate that as a community experiences success with redevelopment, property values increase substantially and housing for low to middle income households becomes out of reach. It would be worthwhile for the City to research different programs that can sustain a certain amount of affordable housing. One such method would be to incentivize affordable housing development if in a mixed use development 25% of the new units are guaranteed for households making less than 80% of the median household income (or below). There are several programs throughout Texas and the U.S. that could be useful for College Station including housing land trusts, non-profit affordable housing associations, and incentive programs for private developers to provide some amount of affordable housing. This may not seem like an issue to immediately address, but being proactive will ensure that individuals starting their career and fresh out of college can continue to live and work in College Station.

